SONG OF THE LONG MARCH

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< CHAPTER 54>

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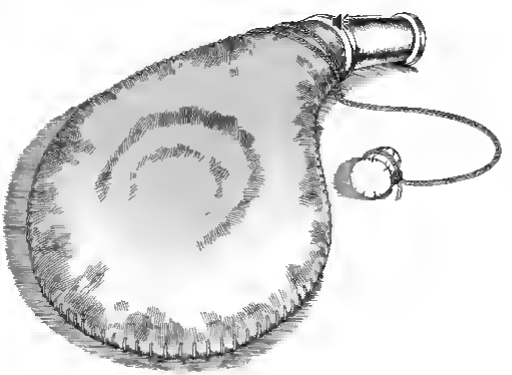

YOU...
YOU ARE THE PRINCESS OF THE UYGHUR?
YES WHEN I BEGGED MY UNCLE TO BRING ME ALONG WITH HIM TO UYGHUR IT WAS WITH THE INTENTION OF SEARCHING FOR MY RELATIVES
BUT I NEVER THOUGHT MY RELATIVES WOULD ACTUALLY BE...
IS THAT WHY YOU ADOPTED AN ALIAS AND MASQUERADED AS A MALE MERCHANT?

WHY DID YOU NOT MENTION THIS?
HOW YOU MUST HAVE SUFFERED!
DON'T WORRY, OLD LADY UNCLE HAS ALWAYS TREATED ME VERY WELL...
THEN CAN I CALL YOU LILI FROM NOW ON?
LITTLE PRINCESS,
IT WOULD BE MY HONOUR.
TUJIA!
YOU CAN JUST CALL ME TUJIA!
LITTLE PRINCESS,
IT SEEMS THAT YOU LIKE OUR LILI VERY MUCH!
I ALSO LIKE YOU VERY MUCH, OLD LADY!
.....
HAHAHA!
THIS CHILD IS SO INTEREST-ING!

.....
LILI,
WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?
OLD LADY...
I WAS JUST THINK-ING,
THAT A CHILD WHOM HAS NEVER KNOWN WAR ...
REALLY IS PRECIOUS.
YOU'RE MAKING THAT FACE AGAIN,

WHAT MADE YOU SO SAD?
...I USED TO HAVE A VERY GOOD FRIEND,
A UYGHUR GIRL.
SHE WAS THE DAUGHTER OF A TRIBE LEADER.
SHE MUST ALSO HAVE BEEN TREASURED BY HER ENTIRE TRIBE....

I THINK SHE WOULD HAVE BEEN JUST LIKE YOU, TUJIA.
IF NOT FOR THE CHAOS OF WAR,
WHERE IS SHE NOW?
THAT CHILD...
SHE HAO ALREADY DIED.
BY THE TIME I LEFT...
I MET HER WHEN MY UNCLE AND I WERE PASSING BY THE TURKS

THAT WAS THE ONLY WAY SHE COULD ESCAPE FROM THE TURKS
BECAUSE...
WHY?
SHE ONCE TOLD ME. THAT THE MEN OF HER TRIBE ALL DIED IN A TERRITORIAL FEUD WITH ANOTHER TRIBE.
AND WHEN THE TURKS ATTACKED,
THE SURVIVING WOMEN OF BOTH TRIBES GOT ENSLAVED...

WHY DID THAT KIND OF THING HAPPEN?
EVEN IF THERE WERE QUARRELS BETWEEN BROTHERS, SHOULDN'T THEY FIGHT OFF THE OUTSIDER BEFORE TURNING AGAINST EACH OTHER?
THAT'S RIGHT.
IT'S LOGIC EVEN WOMEN AND CHILDREN UNDERSTAND.
HOW COULD HER FATHER AND BROTHERS NOT KNOW IT?
BUT NOW THAT THE ELTEBER HAS UNITED THE UYGHUR TRIBES TO RESIST THE TURKS,
THIS SHOULD NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN.
YES,

IT WILL NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN.
HMPH,
WHAT A TERRIBLE BEDTIME STORY.

WOULD YOUR FATHER BE SUCH A FOOLISH MAN?
.....
QUITE A STORYTELLER AREN'T YOU?

DID YOU NOT HAVE A GOOD REST, ELTEBER?
OO YOU KNOW HOW MANY TIMES I GOT PREACHED TO LAST NIGHT?
YOU'RE ALL FRETTING AS IF WE WERE GOING TO WAR WITH XUEYANTUO RIGHT THIS INSTANT...
JUST WHERE DID YOU LOT GET THIS SILLY IDEA FROM?
YOU ARE WISE AND VALIANT, ELTEBER.
INDEED, I HAVE NO WORRIES OF THE SORT.
.....
CALL ME UNCLE.

YOU DON'T SUSPECT ME ANYMORE?
.....
COME OVER HERE

WAS YOUR FATHER AN UGLY MAN?
YOUR MOTHER WAS AN ACCLAIMED BEAUTY.
DON'T ASK FOR TOO MUCH.
YOUR NIECE IS CONSIDERED PRETTY AMONG THE HAN,
UNCLE!

HOW MUCH LAND SHOULD I RETURN TO THEM?
SO, IN MY NIECE'S OPINION,
.....
HOW WOULD I KNOW?
DROP THE ACT.
YOU OBVIOUSLY TOLD THAT STORY TO THE OLD LADY AND YI'NAN'S DAUGHTER,
BECAUSE YOU KNOW THAT YI'NAN AND I WILL BE GOING TO WAR SOONER OR LATER

UNCLE?
BUT THIS PIECE OF LAND DOESN'T BELONG TO YOU AS OF YET, DOES IT,
SO WHAT IF YOU BLOODY EACH OTHER?
UNTIL YOU DEFEAT THE TURKS,
ALL THIS LAND BELONGS TO JIELI KHAN.
AND AFTER WE WIN?
THEN, OF COURSE, THE STRONG GET MORE, THE WEAK GET LESS,
AND THE POWERLESS GET NONE.

GO CALL YOUR UNCLE OVER. I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR HOW HE 'PERSUADED' THOSE DISOBEDIENT LITTLE TRIBES TO FOLLOW HIM.
ALL RIGHT.
NOT BAD.
THOUGH YOUR LOOKS MAY BE AVERAGE,
YOU'VE GOT A GOOD HEAD ON YOUR SHOULDERS.

IN THE END, YOU'VE INHERITED THE INTELLIGENCE OF OUR TRIBE
AND THE CRAFTINESS OF THE HAN.
Chang'an
Eastern outskirts
Zhao's shop
WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?!
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR AGES!
WAIT HERE. I'LL BE BACK SOON.
YES, SIR.
LET'S TALK INSIDE.
WHERE'S THE LITTLE STRATEGIST? I CAME TO DELIVER A LETTER

WHAT?!
SHE ALREADY LEFT FOR THE WESTERN REGIONS
SHE'S NOT IN CHANG'AN.
HOW MUCH FURTHER DO I NEED TO GO NOW?!
WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SO EARLIER?!
YOU'VE DONE ENOUGH ALREADY.
BESIDES THE FACT THAT YOU DON'T KNOW THE WAY,
FOR A TURK TO BE LOOKING FOR THE YANHANGMEN'S LEADER IN XUEYANTUO TERRITORY. . ARE YOU TRYING TO MAKE TROUBLE FOR THE MASTER?
BUT MUJIN SAID I CAN ONLY RETURN WHEN I HAVE A REPLY.
JUST STAY HERE FOR A WHILE.
I'LL SEND OUR FASTEST MESSENGER HE WILL RETURN IMMEDIATELY UPON RECEIVING HER LETTER IN REPLY

HOW LONG WILL THAT TAKE?
IF EVERY-THING GOES WELL...
IT SHOULD TAKE A MONTH OR SO
Eastern Turk
Outside the
General's Camp
Pop

gulp
gulp
gulp
gulp
... THAT'S THE LAST FLASK
CAN YOU LEAVE A MOUTHFUL FOR ME?
DON'T NAG!
whoosh
thump

SUN!
ASHINA SUN,
THE KHAN IS AGEING,
AND YOU ARE STILL YOUNG.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT
WHOSE PROTECTION YOU WILL SEEK IN THE FUTURE?
NOT YOURS, IN ANY CASE.
HEH.

LET ME GUESS ..
YOU STILL HATE ME FOR SETTING WOLVES ON YOU WHEN YOU WERE FIVE?
OR WHEN I KNOCKED OUT TWO OF YOUR TEETH WHEN YOU WERE SEVEN?
BUT SEE, I DON'T BEGRUDGE YOU FOR KILLING MY WOLVES,
NOR, OF COURSE, FOR BITING OFF A PIECE OF MY FLESH.
.....
I'VE GIVEN YOU A CHANCE TO LIVE,
LITTLE PUP.

.....
I ASKED THE MEN TO KILL A LAMB.
IT SHOULD BE DONE ROASTING BY NOW
FOLLOWING A TEGIN LIKE ME...
HAS BEEN HARD ON YOU GUYS.

Woooooo
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
...THE KHAN IS INSPECTING THE TROOPS
LET'S GO BACK.
Woooooo
Woooooo
WHEN I WAS YOUNG,
ONLY NOW DO I KNOW...
Woooooo
Woooooo
IF THERE WAS SOMETHING I COULDN'T DO, I ALWAYS THOUGHT IT WAS BECAUSE I DIDN'T TRY HARD ENOUGH.

EVEN IF I RISK MY LIFE.
THAT THERE ARE ACTUALLY SO MANY THINGS I CAN'T DO...
HOW I WISH YOU GUYS COULD BE LEFT OUT OF THIS

Artwork from "Gu...rding".